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## Transgender Parents!

Okay, let me start off by saying that no, of course I don't have all the answers, who does? I just have a lot of life experience as far as the children of transgendered parents are concerned.

So, let's see, my name is Jess, I'm 17, I've been happily female my whole life and I don't feel the need to change it any time soon. I live on my mother's and stepmother's farm. I don't do farm stuff though; I'm a would-be suburbanite. My mom, Raven Kaldera, a FTM (female to male) and my step-mom, Bella Kaldera, a MTF (male to female) met when I was 7 and they fell madly in love, moved in with each other, blah, blah, blah.

When I was 8 my mom told me he was going to transition. He called me upstairs and said, "Jess, honey, I have something very important to tell you, I'm going to become a boy..." Now I'll whole-heartedly admit that I'm a freak; I've grown up around all sorts of strange people which also includes transgendered folks. But let me tell you something, it's completely different when it happens to someone you love; someone like your mother no less. So of course there was a moment's pause then I replied, "Like Bella but reversed?" He started to laugh and said, "Yeah, it's going to be a little bit like that. I'm going to change a lot, grow a beard and my voice will deepen."

At this point I was a little worried; would my mother still love me the same? So I asked, "Will I be able to still call you momma?" He looked thoughtful for a moment and then responded, "If that will make you feel better then you may call me mom, dad or whatever makes you feel comfortable." That was our compromise.

I can also say that I've been so deeply immersed in the transgendered community since such a young age that I've seen almost all it has to offer. Most notably information, which is very important in this case. I've seen so many transgendered parents come out and say, "I can't tell my child this, what would they think? I don't think they'd understand my reasons for doing it, what do I tell them?" and most popular of all, "What if they hate me for it?"

Well, I'm going to stop this one right in its tracks. They won't hate you for being transgendered nearly as much as they will hate you for lying to them, I promise you that much. If they're spiteful enough to hate you, then they would have found something else to be wrong with you or your life-style. Also, let me tell you right now: There Is Nothing You Could Do That Would Hurt Them More Than Not Telling Them! I could never, ever stress enough the importance of telling your child something this big. They will find out, and I mean will find out. I mean, when are you going to tell them? When they're eighteen? "Hey, sweetie, since you're an adult now I thought it would be time to tell you daddy/mom's little secret."

Waiting until they're grown up to transition isn't necessarily the right thing to do either. Kids learn from your examples. Having them grow up watching you be miserable and depressed and hate your body is not a good example to set for them. Watching you put off the most important decision of your life won't exactly teach them how to figure out who they are and handle hard

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choices about their identity.

All right. Sorry about that, but it's really hard to imagine that when this poor kid finds out, it might not be from the parent. You can best deliver this news to them in a way that's easy to swallow, and that can get their fears, hopes, and most importantly, their questions answered. That means the parent's questions too, as well as the kid's. Questions, by the way, are a really good sign your kid is accepting the change. There are no bad questions. Questions are wonderful; encourage them whenever possible, it makes the child feel reassured and loved.

If there is a question that you can't answer, don't sweat it; there is an entire community of people who might have the answers. So, with your child, go and find out the answers. It's good morale and helps them feel like they're in on it too. Also never say, "Well, I'll find out later," and then drag your heels. The second you do that you've lost not only their trust but their support.

OK, next tough question. How do you make your kid understand? Imagine me rolling my eyes over here. I really shouldn't have to even point this out, but you can't make him or her do anything. You should lay it out for them in simple terms. This, of course, all depends on the age. Don't talk to your teenager like they're five; speak to them with the respect and honesty that you would a peer, or they won't listen and they'll feel resentful at you for it. On the other hand, don't talk to your five-year-old like they're an adult. Use words that they can understand, and leave the really big words like "vaginoplasty" and "mastectomy" for a later conversation that they should be the ones to bring up. Try to stick to short 2-syllable compound words like "support-group" and "you're always going to be my (insert cutesy catch phrase for child here) no matter how I look." It's very important to make this point.

There's something else important that needs to be said. Some transgendered people, after transition, don't want their kid to call them "Mom" or "Dad" anymore, especially not in public, because they fear that it would out them, and they may not want the reminder of their "past life". They ask the kid to call them "Aunt Betty" or "Uncle Joe" or something else. Let's stress this: it isn't fair to ask a kid to call you something other than what they've been calling you for years. Exceptions to this rule might be: 1) if there is no other parent and the kid is excited about suddenly having a parent of the opposite sex; 2) the kid is a baby (or not born yet) and will grow up calling you by a title of your preferred gender, or 3) if the kid is an older teen or adult who feels comfortable negotiating public and private designations. If the kid is still young, don't make them do it. Allowing them to keep calling you by your old familiar title will help them to feel like they're not really losing a mom or dad, and help them be more comfortable with the situation. You had this child; you took on the responsibility at their birth of putting them first, before other people in your life. What do you value more, their emotional well-being or the opinions of strangers in the mall?

Now, a really hard question I've actually had to answer is "How will they react to this mind bending info?" Well, two possible reactions might be: 1) They already know on some level, and most likely will have a lot of questions for you. Be sure to find some way to answer them all. Or 2) they're completely shocked and need a little time to adjust. If this happens, don't worry, it's a natural way of coping. Just be calm and tell them no questions are bad, you'll always love them and you won't treat them differently. Keep true to your promises, especially the last one.

And as for the "They won't understand my reasons for this big change..." thing (see me putting my hands on my hips and glowering at you), that's not an excuse and you know it. Whether or

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not they "get it" largely depends on you, and how you explain it to them. (Talk to other transgendered people in your community who have already transitioned for good advice on how to explain your identity and needs to clueless others.) And if you don't want to put in the effort to explain it to them, you're in trouble, because if you make this change, you'll be explaining to people and educating them for the rest of your life, so you'd better get used to it. The people who love you are the best place to start, because they actually have a vested interest in understanding and accepting. Besides, if you don't at least try, you're failing your kid in the process.

I think I've talked myself out now, and I hope this wasn't too harsh, but like many truths it needed to be said.

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### ***Yikes! You're A Transgendered Parent! Now What Do You Do?***

2002, Jessica Brangwyn, @amboyz.org